

WSJ	Barron's	MarketWatch	IBD
DJIA 37592.98	0.31% ▼	S&P 500 4783.83	0.08% ▲
Nasdaq 14972.76	0.02% ▲	U.S. 10 Yr 2/32 3.949%	▲
Crude Oil 72.80	1.08% ▲	Euro 1.0952	0.18% ▼

English Edition | Print Edition | Video | Audio | Latest Headlines | More

Latest World Business U.S. Politics Economy Tech Finance Opinion Arts & Culture Lifestyle Real Estate Personal Finance Health Style Sports

OPINION | THE WEEKEND INTERVIEW

When Terrorists Talk, They Listen

Memri, the Middle East Media Research Institute fights Hamas by telling the world what its leaders are saying.

By Elliot Kaufman
Jan. 12, 2024 4:27 pm ET



Steve Stalinsky and Yigal Carmon. ILLUSTRATION: BARBARA KELLEY

Yigal Carmon is one of the few Israelis who can claim to have predicted this war. His Aug. 31 article “[Signs of Possible War in September-October](#)” cited provocations by Hezbollah, escalating violence in the West Bank and threats from Hamas as evidence of regional coordination for something big. “Israel will likely be compelled to undertake a large-scale response,” he wrote, “even at the cost of an all-out war.”

Some details were off, but Mr. Carmon says anyone paying attention would have seen the writing on the wall. “They said it all. They said everything,” Mr. Carmon, a former Israeli intelligence officer and counterterrorism adviser to two prime ministers, says in a phone interview from Jerusalem. As president and a co-founder of Memri, the Middle East Media Research Institute, he had

publicized Hamas's videos advertising its drills for an invasion of Israel, as well as its claims that [total war](#) was coming.

But Hamas is always threatening war, and most of the time it comes to naught. "If they publish it many times, then you can ignore it?" he asks in response to the point. "I say just the opposite. If they publish it many times, it suggests they mean it and you cannot ignore it. You must take it seriously."

Unfortunately, the tendency of sophisticated observers is to play down what terrorists say they believe. In a phone interview from Washington, Steve Stalinsky, Memri's executive director, points out that in all the coverage of the war, "we have heard almost nothing about the Hamas ideology. Yeah, sure, sometimes you hear about the Hamas Covenant"—the group's charter, which spells out its genocidal intentions—"but that's it, and no one even prints it."

Memri [prints](#) it, and [publishes](#) video [compilations](#) of Hamas leaders stating their movement's goal: to build an Islamic [caliphate](#) stretching from Palestine across the region and the world. That sounds more like international jihad than Palestinian nationalism.

Headquartered in Washington, Memri monitors and translates TV broadcasts, newspapers, sermons, social-media posts, textbooks and official statements in Arabic, Farsi and several other languages. The work may be drudgery, but it yields a steady stream of articles and viral video clips that condemn the region's tyrants, terrorists and two-faced intellectuals with their own words.

MOST POPULAR NEWS

Memri also documents Gazans' indoctrination from childhood into a religious ideology that puts them on a war footing. "Their textbooks are our life," Mr. Carmon says, "but no one paid attention." Instead, Israeli leaders were convinced that Qatari money and past beatings would deter Hamas.

Mr. Carmon directs me to a recent [article](#) in which he writes, "Any Arab who hears American officials say that Qatar is America's ally would burst into laughter—those clueless Americans, who don't even know that Qatar is spitting in their face with wild anti-U.S. incitement 24/7 . . . because they only watch the deceptive Al-Jazeera TV in English." On the Arabic-language channel, he says, Qatari-owned Al Jazeera "is the megaphone of Hamas like it was the megaphone of al Qaeda. Every speech, every statement—everything is aired several times until everybody gets it."

The article faults the Biden administration for "pleading with Qatar" instead of threatening it: "Just one comment by the U.S. administration that it is considering relocating Al Udeid Air Base from Qatar (without which Qatar will cease to exist within a week) to the UAE will set the Qataris running to bring all the American hostages back home." Instead, while hostage negotiations stall, the U.S. has quietly agreed to extend its presence at the Qatari base for another decade, according to a Jan. 2 CNN report. Mr. Carmon seems mystified by U.S. weakness. "Since when do experienced American officials conduct negotiations without power pressure on the side?"

MOST POPULAR OPINION

On so many issues, Mr. Stalinsky is surprised simply that policy makers have been surprised. "We translate the Houthis too," he says. The Iran-backed Yemeni rebels "have been [promising](#), in case a war ever happened, to do exactly what

they're doing now"—[attack](#) Israel, U.S. forces and international shipping. Yet the Biden administration took months to formulate a response, even as most global shipping has been forced to avoid the Suez Canal.

With some 70 employees and a clunky website, Memri has had an outsize influence on the post-Oct. 7 conversation. Take the trendy calls for a cease-fire, which is the key to a Hamas victory. Memri's translations have furnished supporters of Israel with a knockdown reply: What good is a cease-fire when Hamas pledges to repeat its Oct. 7 massacre "again and again"?

That quote is from Ghazi Hamad, a Hamas politburo member, in an Oct. 24 [appearance](#) on Lebanese television. We know about it because Memri was watching. "We will do this again and again," Mr. Hamad says in Arabic. "The Al Aqsa Flood"—Hamas's name for the Oct. 7 operation—"is just the first time, and there will be a second, a third, a fourth."

Hamas terrorists are open about their intentions, Mr. Stalinsky says, "but they aren't broadcasting it to the West." When he wants, Mr. Hamad poses as a humanitarian, lately praising Canada, Australia and New Zealand in English for supporting a cease-fire. Messrs. Carmon and Stalinsky try to "bridge the language gap" to inform the West.

Every so often, it works. Memri's translation of Mr. Hamad's remarks has been quoted repeatedly by Secretary of State Antony Blinken, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby and other senior U.S. officials under pressure from the left to give Hamas what it wants.

The message has staying power. In a Dec. 26 [op-ed](#) in these pages, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cited the Hamas bigwig's remarks as his first proof of why Hamas must be destroyed. Israel then played the video clip of Mr. Hamad—with Memri logo intact—during its [opening statement](#) rebutting false allegations at the International Court of Justice on Friday. Even Sen. Bernie Sanders has resisted calls for a full cease-fire on grounds that Hamas wants "permanent war."

Anything that reminds the West of Hamas's aims is good for Israel, but Memri doesn't see its job as doing public relations for the Jewish state. "The PR efforts to show Israel in a positive way have mostly been a failure," Mr. Stalinsky says, regarding the younger generation. Perhaps there's a role for celebrating Israel's progressive features, or for TikTok videos of dancing female soldiers, but Memri doesn't bother with any of that. It does research to expose Israel's enemies for what they are.

An Oct. 8 Memri TV [clip](#) shows Hamas leader Ali Baraka explaining how Israel was fooled: "We made them think that Hamas was busy with governing Gaza, and that it wanted to focus on the 2.5 million Palestinians."

An Oct. 19 [clip](#) has Hamas leader Khaled Mashal shrugging off the suffering Hamas has brought on Gazan civilians. "Nations are not easily liberated," he says. "The Algerian people sacrificed six million martyrs." Hamas would gladly follow that example.

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

1. WSJ Opinion: Will Trump 'Destroy' Democracy?



2. Large Protests in Yemen After U.S., British Strikes on Houthi Targets



3. WSJ Opinion: The Pandemic Killed Biden's Presidency



4. Trump Civil-Fraud Trial Explained: Why His Business Empire Is at Stake



5. WSJ Opinion: Harvard's President Doesn't Go Quietly



In an Oct. 30 [video](#), Mousa Abu Marzouk, another senior Hamas leader, says unabashedly that Hamas's tunnels are for protecting its fighters, not Gazan civilians: "It is the responsibility of the United Nations to protect them."

READ MORE WEEKEND INTERVIEWS

- [Dean Phillips, the Democrat Who Says Biden Can't Win](#) December 22, 2023
 - [A Populist on the Verge of Power](#) December 15, 2023
 - [Can Nikki Haley's 'Strategy of Conviction' Beat Trump?](#) December 8, 2023
-

Most recently, Memri has Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh declaring on Jan. 9, in a speech aired on Al Jazeera: "We should hold on to the victory that took place on Oct. 7 and build upon it." To the West, Mr. Haniyeh demands an end to the war and even gestures at a two-state solution, but to the Arab masses he says "the time has come for the jihad of the swords." To these videos, Memri adds only captioned translations, so that viewers draw

conclusions for themselves.

One of Memri's earliest successes came with Yasser Arafat. By 2002 the Palestinian terrorist leader was used to being feted as a statesman. In a "60 Minutes" [interview](#), however, Arafat was flummoxed when Mike Wallace quoted Memri's translations of his Arabic speeches: " 'Millions of holy warriors are on their way to Jerusalem. Jihad! Jihad! Jihad!' . . . What does that mean?"

Arafat "got Memri'd," as Mr. Stalinsky puts it. "People still get Memri'd to this day," he says—including Arafat's successor. A month before the war, Memri published a [video](#) of Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority. Lecturing in Arabic to his Fatah Revolutionary Council, Mr. Abbas spouts a remarkable variety of conspiracy theories about the Jews, culminating in a denial that Hitler was antisemitic. "At least once a year we catch him saying stuff like that," Mr. Stalinsky says, but this time the moment was ripe. The video made international headlines, elicited a U.S. condemnation and dashed at last Mr. Abbas's reputation as a moderate.

Now, when the issue of the "day after" Hamas is on the lips of U.S. leaders, it is taken for granted that the Palestinian Authority is unfit to take over in its present configuration. Mr. Netanyahu says that he won't allow Gaza to go from "Hamas-stan" to "Fatah-stan," and the Biden administration has become willing to meet him halfway. Mr. Blinken calls for a "revitalized" Palestinian Authority. U.S. officials are quoted looking for "new blood."

If the administration tries to hoist one of Mr. Abbas's Fatah colleagues as the man to run Gaza, expect a clip from Memri's [archive](#), 11,000-strong, to alter the debate. "The others are extremists too," Mr. Stalinsky says. "They're totally antisemitic and often supportive of jihad."

That isn't even the main problem, Mr. Carmon argues. "The PA as a body is corrupt to its toes. No one respects them," he says. "Abbas says, 'I won't come to Gaza on the back of an Israeli tank,' and that's a good line. But Fatah won't come anyway because they would be slaughtered." Hamas, their fellow Palestinians, would kill them.

Memri's work also looks at America, where Mr. Stalinsky says "something has changed." Speaking in Arabic, many American Muslim radicals are "openly supportive of Hamas and the Oct. 7 attack. They're bolder about it now."

Most of Memri's American translations are of [imams and scholars](#) who are obscure to the larger public. But one that shook the White House was of Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which styles itself a mainstream, well-connected Muslim advocacy group. Mr. Awad was [caught celebrating the Oct. 7 attack](#) as an act of Gazan liberation and "self-defense." President Biden had to remove CAIR as a partner in the White House's Strategy to Counter Antisemitism.

"Awad wasn't expecting that anyone would be paying attention to his video outside the intended audience," Mr. Stalinsky says. He was speaking at a convention of American Muslims for Palestine, an organizer of anti-Israel rallies across America with its own [record of extremism](#). Nobody objected to Mr. Awad's remarks until Memri exposed them two weeks later.

The video revealed how the anti-Israel movement talks to itself. But lately it isn't so subtle, with pro-Hamas protests in U.S. streets. "There is an element of trying to intimidate the Jewish community," Mr. Stalinsky observes, "going to kosher restaurants, community centers, Hanukkah celebrations, harassing Jewish students." Efforts to disrupt Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations, and to block roads, bridges and tunnels, also suggest a new willingness to push around the American majority.

All of this is escalating with a backdrop of rising danger from terrorist groups, Mr. Stalinsky says. "Hamas has all of a sudden become the king of the jihadis around the world," who are energized and looking to "jump on the bandwagon," he says. "We've monitored it since the beginning of jihadis going online, and there have never been so many open threats to the U.S.—explicit threats."

Mr. Stalinsky worries we're at the start of another cycle: "People pay attention, then they don't want to pay attention, and then they have to pay attention" when something terrible happens. "Because it always comes back to the Middle East."

Mr. Kaufman is the Journal's letters editor.

HIDE CONVERSATION (0)

Conversation

By joining the conversation you are accepting our community rules and terms. To view rules, terms and FAQs, [click here](#). Questions can be sent to moderator@wsj.com.

Conversations on news articles and news columns must be kept on the topic of the story. In opinion content, conversations can delve into other subjects. The conversation will close on this article four days after publication.

Be the first to comment...





No one seems to have shared their thoughts on this topic yet

Leave a comment so your voice will be heard first.

Powered by OpenWeb

[Terms](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Feedback](#)

SPONSORED OFFERS

KOHL'S:

[Kohl's promo code: Save an Extra 15% online and in-store](#)

WALMART:

[\\$20 Off Walmart Promo Code - Any \\$50+ Order](#)

TARGET:

[Take 20% Off Your Entire Order - Target promo Code](#)

NEWEGG:

[10% Off Sitewide - Newegg Promo Code](#)

DELL:

[Enjoy \\$40 off smart speaker with Dell Coupon](#)

BEST BUY:

[Save \\$1000 discount on iPhone 15 Pro and Pro Max - Best Buy Coupon](#)

[BACK TO TOP](#) ↗

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

a Dow Jones company

English Edition ▼

WSJ Membership

- [Buy Side Exclusives](#)
- [Subscription Options](#)
- [Why Subscribe?](#)
- [Corporate Subscriptions](#)
- [WSJ Higher Education Program](#)
- [WSJ High School Program](#)
- [Public Library Program](#)
- [WSJ Live](#)
- [Commercial Partnerships](#)

Customer Service

- [Customer Center](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Cancel My Subscription](#)

Tools & Features

- [Newsletters & Alerts](#)
- [Guides](#)
- [Topics](#)
- [My News](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Video Center](#)
- [Watchlist](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Visual Stories](#)

Advertise

- [Commercial Real Estate Ads](#)
- [Place a Classified Ad](#)
- [Sell Your Business](#)
- [Sell Your Home](#)
- [Recruitment & Career Ads](#)
- [Coupons](#)
- [Digital Self Service](#)

More

- [About Us](#)
- [Content Partnerships](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [Jobs at WSJ](#)
- [News Archive](#)
- [Register for Free](#)
- [Reprints & Licensing](#)
- [Buy Issues](#)
- [WSJ Shop](#)



Dow Jones Products | [Barron's](#) | [BigCharts](#) | [Dow Jones Newswires](#) | [Factiva](#) | [Financial News](#) | [Mansion Global](#) | [MarketWatch](#) | [Risk & Compliance](#)
[Buy Side from WSJ](#) | [WSJ Pro](#) | [WSJ Video](#) | [WSJ Wine](#)

[Privacy Notice](#) | [Cookie Notice](#) | [Manage Cookies](#) | [Copyright Policy](#) | [Data Policy](#) | [Subscriber Agreement & Terms of Use](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Accessibility](#)

Copyright ©2024 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

